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ONE HUNDRED NINTH CONGRESS

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

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INDEPENDENT

June 14, 2006

Honorable Michael O. Leavitt  
Secretary  
Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am writing to inquire about your use of a private jet for travel to events promoting the Medicare prescription drug plan. According to an article in today's *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, you have repeatedly requisitioned a private jet, which is leased by the Centers for Disease Control for use in responding to public health emergencies, for your travel to these events.<sup>1</sup> This practice has incurred a large expense to taxpayers and in at least two cases has interfered with the emergency function for which CDC originally obtained the aircraft.

The use of passenger jets by governmental officials carries with it a large cost to the taxpayer and, as such, is subject to exacting federal regulations.<sup>2</sup> By the terms of its lease, the jet you have used costs \$250,000 per month, plus \$3,000 per hour to operate — many times the cost of commercially available travel. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* details that you have used this jet on “19 trips to more than 90 cities,” since January in order to attend events promoting the new Medicare prescription drug plan and meetings on pandemic flu preparedness.<sup>3</sup> The total cost for your use of the jet was reported as \$720,000 in hourly charges, which does not include the monthly charge that was paid by CDC.

In addition to these expenses the article raises additional question of whether your use of the jet has interfered with CDC functions. On two occasions that you were using the jet, CDC

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<sup>1</sup> *Cabinet Official is Primary User of CDC Jet*, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, (June 14, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Circular No. A-126, Revised, White House Office of Management and Budget, (May 22, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

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has had to charter another aircraft — at additional cost to the taxpayer — to carry out the emergency missions for which the jet is primarily retained.

In light of these concerns I request that you provide me with further information relating to the ownership and leasing of passenger aircraft by HHS, and the Department's use of those aircraft since January 2001. Specifically, I request:

- A list of private aircraft owned or leased by HHS, including each aircraft's assigned agency and intended function;
- Copies of all contracts for the leasing of passenger aircraft for use by the Department;
- Copies of all departmental or agency policies relating to travel on these aircraft;
- Information about each use of passenger aircraft by the Department since January 2001, including the date and route flown, the names and positions of all passengers, the purpose of the flight, and any other documentation of use required by federal rules, including OMB Circular A-126;
- Information on the cost of each flight since January 2001 and the justification for the use of government aircraft in lieu of commercial travel, as required by federal rules, including OMB Circular A-126.

I would appreciate your prompt attention to this request. I ask that you provide these documents by no later than June 30, 2006.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Henry A. Waxman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Henry A. Waxman  
Ranking Minority Member